

EAF 29 - Question 3: Platonic ideology versus Aristotelian reality

Question 3 (the Education Initiative) mandates a 2% tax on revenue of businesses selling more than one million dollars to be used for “education”. Supporters follow Plato: reason triumphs reality. What we want is good and right, so we are justified in using government force (taxation) to compel others to provide it for us. Those who oppose us are not just wrong, they are evil—motivated solely by self-interest, with no regard for what is clearly right and just. Aristotle, in contrast, advocated examining fact and evidence to understand the world. Thus Question 3 demonstrates division of people into two groups: those who live to tell others what to do (Platocrats) versus those who resist being so told (Aristotelians).

Ronald Reagan phrased it best (*A Time for Choosing*, 1964): “. . . maximum individual freedom, consistent with order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism. . . Regardless of their sincerity, their humanitarian motives, those who would sacrifice freedom for security . . . Public servants say, always with the best of intentions, ‘What greater service we could render if only we had a little more money and a little more power’ . . . [but when] government sets out to do that, it must use force and coercion to achieve its purpose. So we have come to a time for choosing”.

Use the Reagan Choice to analyze Question 3. Platocrats—Steve Sebelius, Brian Greenspun, teachers’ unions—demand more money for “education” for the children. But they offer no specificity as to what is to be accomplished, where and how that money will be used, nor any accountability for results. It is sufficient that we say Question 3 will do good. But Aristotelians say examine the evidence.

Economic experience validates the axiom: tax something, get less of it. For Question 3, the tax will result in less business. But businesses do not pay taxes; they pass them on, according to accounting practice (revenue – costs = the bottom line), to consumers (higher prices) and/or to employees (unemployment or lower wages) and/or owners (less profit and future investment in product improvements, more jobs and higher ROI). Thus Question 3 is opposed by every type of Nevada business from gaming to construction to the corner hot dog stand and even the AFL-CIO.

However, Question 3 Platocrats will flood Nevada with negative advertising, accusing opponents of being anti-children, therefore racists who deny poor and minority kids a “quality education”—no facts, no evidence; just vilification of opponents. Now, negative advertising rarely succeeds in product marketing, because consumers have continuing opportunities to evaluate the products advertised. Alas, negative political ads too often do persuade many voters—because most people only intermittently vote. Those negative ads constitute almost all the information voters have. But facts and evidence are stubborn things.

Aristotle: “The fact is the starting point”. The fact, founded upon a multitude of evidence, is that “education” in Nevada today is sorely lacking. Test scores, graduation rates and employability are too low, while teachers are granted tenure after three years, are virtually

impossible to fire, and receive pay raises based on seniority and graduate degrees in education courses completed in summer school.

The Reagan Choice answer: individual freedom—which allows individual students to seek better education and aspiring teachers to prove themselves in the classroom without several years of education college courses. The three step analysis: is the goal feasible and worthwhile?; can individual initiative (the private sector) accomplish this goal more effectively than totalitarianism (government)?; what are the possible consequences of implementation?

Education—of students—is certainly feasible and worthwhile, but endorsing that goal does not require throwing more money at the teachers union and poorly administered schools. Charter schools, private and parochial schools, for-profit academies are demanded by more and more students and their parents. Perhaps the WWII GI bill model might serve: award education tax monies directly to those individuals; set measurable education achievements; let them decide how to achieve those goals. Consequences: evidence clearly shows that continuing to do what is not working—more money to unaccountable teachers, bureaucrats and failing schools (especially those in our poorest neighborhoods)—is the definition of insanity.

Let's try maximum freedom—under contract to achieve measurable goals—to private sector education providers and individual students and families. If freedom is found wanting after a sufficient period, we can always go back to Platonics—throwing money at “education”.

